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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a creative approach to developing literary understanding and writing ability in students in a college introduction to literature course. Eight assignments are described which pair literary works having some feature in common. A sample suggestion from the first group of exercises, concerned with characterization, is as follows: Write a scene for two or more secondary characters in "Hamlet," taking your cue from dialogue or stage directions suggesting some action or conversation that takes place offstage. A typical assignment from the next group, dealing with "Paradise Lost" and "Frankenstein," suggests discussion about monsters in "Paradise Lost" and how they came to be monsters and also about paradises in "Frankenstein" and how they are lost. The next two sections address more complex themes, such as pairing "The Stranger" with "Dubliners" and rewriting a complete work in another genre, for example: Imagine that one of "The Canterbury Tales" has been made into a first-rate movie, and write a review of it. The following section requires that the student impose what is known about one writer upon another. A sample assignment is to make believe that either Joyce or Kafka is a self-absorbed magazine editor and that the other author has submitted a short story for publication. In this way the student--a beginning writer--learns to write from being "between writers," i.e., "between" two significant, experienced writers. The final section shows how the student might expand these approaches to develop a research paper. (NKA)

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BETWEEN WRITERS: EXPLORING LITERATURE FROM (DEEP) WITHIN

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To read literature is to traverse its vacancies. There is that inevitable distance at which one work stands from another, a distance which is created by the very fact of difference, and the extent of which is determined by further differences: psychological, cultural, historical. Yet there is also interaction, the closing of that distance through the activities of a reader who has engaged both works. The works are measured against each other, intermingled in the reader's memory, perhaps even revised in terms of each other. In a literature course, the situation I have in mind, the reader is also a writer; she must eventually "do a paper on" what she has been assigned to read. For the sake of conceptual simplicity, let us keep the focus narrowed to two works and one reader; and in order to de-mystify the situation, humanize it, let us regard it as one involving three writers--one writer "between" two others. But if the course is an introduction to literature--and that is specifically what I have had in mind all along--then one of these three writers is quite inexperienced. So much so that she must rely heavily on her two colleagues, who are very experienced. The writing she produces can be considered a joint effort, something accomplished "between" the three of them.

A much more direct way of introducing the sequence of activities that follows would be simply to say that I am continually searching for alternatives to the sorts of assignments traditionally given to students inexperienced both as readers and as writers. Such students find such assignments

onerous, pointless, and (therefore) boring. They are probably not as bad as all that, but many of them are so unliterary in spirit that they tend to confirm a student's worst expectations. Having labored through a comparison/contrast or an analysis of a work's "thesis," she may feel she has been right to regard literature as alien, inscrutable, tedious. She hasn't been allowed to experience the "pleasure of the text," hasn't been encouraged to become emotionally involved, to make the literary work part of her life and in turn to become part of its life. And because of all these things, the writing she has produced is probably just plain lousy. If it isn't, it is probably plagiarism. (Understandable. You know your English teacher wants you to come up with the right answer, so where do you turn? To other English teachers, of course--though print has transformed their lectures into "interpretations," they themselves into "literary critics.")

To get students into literature, and thus to get literature into students, it is first necessary to humanize and democratize their introduction to it. Not "literary texts" on the one hand and mere students on the other. But rather: we are all writers here, some more experienced than others. It is no good simply to say this; it must be demonstrated. And it must be demonstrated before a writing assignment is given. If we are all writers here, then students should read with a view to rewriting. The traditional questions--What happens? Why? What does --- signify? (symbolize? suggest?)--should

be displaced by a series of others, questions that require students to approach a work actively rather than passively, like creative writers instead of cautious readers. What do you think should happen? What would happen if you were the major character? if your best friend were? your favorite TV character? Students who have not finished the reading because it was "too boring" are particularly useful in this sort of discussion. What would you like to see happen next? How could the proceedings be "jazzed up"? Dissatisfaction with the text is another asset. How would you write that scene? What do you want to see happen at the end? Not only can students enter the world of the text, but it can enter their worlds. How would this character be treated if she showed up in your neighborhood? If you brought him home for dinner, how would each member of your family react? As students begin to answer such questions--and I have mentioned only a few of the questions that can and should be asked--they also begin to feel less suspicious of literature, less intimidated by it. In fact, because they are being asked to respond like writers, they begin to feel a sense of kinship with the writer of the literary work that started all of this. And re-creating that work, they are better able to understand the original act of creation.

Students can also be asked to compare themselves with characters in a work, to compare other "real people"--both well known and just known to them--with these fictional people, even to compare one another with these others. They can then be asked

to remember experiences that in some way parallel those being narrated. And of course these "person/character," "experience/episode" interactions can be turned into writing assignments, as can the other sorts of exchanges I have referred to. Following are a few of the writing assignments I have used to continue the interaction "between writers." These assignments, or variations upon them, can be used with any literary work, and in fact have been used with many others. Yet I refer only to those works that I have taught recently in introductory courses. And it will soon be evident that when I speak of "experienced writers" I have in mind the most significant figures in world literature. Such writers as those whose works I will name should be the ones students encounter "even" in an introduction to literature. They will always prove themselves worth the time and the trouble. In addition, they are the writers who inspire the best writing: they always have.

I have limited myself to eight assignments:

1. Show me which one of the main characters in Mrs. Dalloway and which one of the main characters in Tristan and Isolde you identify with. Bring in parallels--feelings, values, characteristics, experiences--but also talk about significant differences, particularly those which help you to understand these characters. Also tell me what you would say or do differently and why.
2. Rewrite a scene from either The Trial or A Portrait of the Artist from the point of view of a secondary character.

Not only should your rewriting incorporate what the character says and does in the original; it should reveal something about the character, especially in his or her attitude toward the central character, that the original does not.

Write in the first person and in the past tense, and try to have the writing style reflect the character. In your narrative include dialogue (taken from the original), indirect discourse (dialogue taken from the original and summarized) and physical description (some, but not all, provided in the original).

3. Write a scene for two or more of the secondary characters in Hamlet. Take your cue from dialogue or stage directions suggesting some action or conversation that takes place off stage. (I suggest you take a look at Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.) Include stage directions; model them after those in Hamlet itself. Please tell me where in the play you want your scene included.
4. At one point in The Trial K. plans to draw up a written defense and hand it in to the Court. He fails to do it, so you do it for him. Begin by finding out exactly what K. intends to include in his written defense. Write in the first person, as if you were actually K., and bring in as much relevant material as you can from the unfinished chapters and deleted passages.
5. Conduct a comprehensive interview with one of the major characters in Crime and Punishment. Try to cover as many

of the following topics as you can: love, sex, morality, religion, environment, politics, family. (Don't be afraid to introduce other topics which you feel have particular significance for the central character you choose.) Have your questions apply specifically to the work from which the character comes, and base the answers on what is said, and suggested, by the character himself, the narrator and other characters.

6. There are thirty-one pilgrims on the journey to Canterbury, and Chaucer originally planned for each of them to tell four tales: two on the way there, two on the way back. But we have only twenty-three tales, and two of these are unfinished. What I want you to do is to give me a twenty-fourth tale, and to have one of Chaucer's pilgrims tell it--a pilgrim important enough to have shown up on our reading list (Knight, Miller et al.).

You'll be able to give me only a summary of your twenty-fourth Canterbury tale, but I still want you to show me what you've learned about life in medieval England. (Summary? The one I've given you of Hamlet is a good example.) How does one come up with a "new" Canterbury tale? Do as Chaucer did--"plagiarize." That is, use a folktale, novel, short story, movie, TV show, or historical event. And please identify your source or I'll die of curiosity. (Remember, though, you can alter the original all you like.)

Follow up the summary of your tale with a short commentary (three paragraphs, at least five or six sentences each, should do it). In your commentary, tell me why that tale is just right for the pilgrim you've selected.

7. In Fiction and the Unconscious (1957), Lesser says that every reader responds to a work of literature by identifying and analogizing. In identifying, he says, we recognize ourselves in several characters simultaneously: we see ourselves as villains and heroes, as victims and oppressors. Analogizing is a bit like daydreaming. According to Lesser, we all create parallels when we read. We may remember or invent a pleasant event, or reconstruct and alter a painful one.

Now for your essay: I want you to talk about the identifying and analogizing you do when reading Othello. Sounds difficult, I realize; but trust me, and Lesser: these two responses are natural and inevitable--if we are reading closely and intently, we are identifying and analogizing. So a discussion of your response to Othello can be organized accordingly: that is, you can focus on "opposed" characters ("villains and heroes...victims and oppressors") when you talk about identifying, and you can focus on particular scenes when you talk about analogizing (the stage directions will tell you exactly where a scene begins and ends).

Please feel free to make use of Lang's summing up of Lesser. But please be sure to "identify" with at least four characters and to "analogize" with at least two complete scenes. Remember: you are exploring both Othello and what you bring to your reading of the play. So keep the discussion as close to "50/50" as you can. The key word here is response.

8. Write a detailed portrait of one of Joyce's Dubliners ten years in the future. Be specific: tell me where your character is living and with whom, if anyone; what s/he is doing for a living, and for fun--if s/he is having fun, that is; how s/he feels these days about faith, family and fatherland; exactly when over the past ten years significant changes have taken place. (Yes, you may choose a character from a work that isn't on our reading list.)

Then make your case: convince me that this portrait of your character ten years later is a plausible one. To make a "case," you of course need "evidence." To get it you have to take a close look at the narrative in which the character has originally appeared: what is there in your character's background and behavior that anticipates your portrait? That is, what "prophetic signs" do you see?

Present tense (yes, even though you'll be describing the future: not "In ten years Eveline will be . . .," but "Here is how I see Eveline in ten years. She is . . .").

Though I have used many other assignments of this sort, these are enough, I think, to make my approach clear, and to stimulate other teachers to try something similar. (Since "we are all writers here," it is crucial that the teacher write also, and more. She must not only do the assignment, but write it out beforehand, show that it is all right to go and play by being the first to do so. Perhaps even more importantly, the novelty of this enterprise requires the teacher to offer as much guidance as she can: students need something to refer to when sitting alone at home over their desks, if not a blueprint, at least a rough sketch. Besides, they will want proof to show their incredulous friends who are taking other sections of introduction to literature.)

So far I have focused on only one aspect of the relationship "between writers." The inexperienced writer enters the work of the experienced writer by participating in its activities, perhaps by delaying closure. Or she forces it to come to terms with her world. Or she investigates its construction by tampering with some of the parts. This is emotional involvement, even a kind of intimacy, but it is only one of the ways of "exploring literature from (deep) within." More complex, and more beneficial, is the relationship I referred to at the outset: an inexperienced writer "between" two experienced writers. Here the inexperienced writer uses a work by one experienced writer to appropriate or re-create a work by another. And then there is a reversal: the second work

is now similarly turned toward or perhaps against the first. An inexperienced writer and two experienced ones thus combine forces; the assignment is done "between them."

Though more complex, this sort of interaction is also more practical. In an introduction to literature, there is limited opportunity to write about each work individually. Usually, at least two works must be considered within a single piece of writing. A typical approach is comparison/contrast, and some of the activities I describe might seem variations upon it. But (I hope) they avoid the artificial yoking that a comparison/contrast demands. My approach, I feel, stresses organic relationships rather than mechanical connections; instead of coercing two literary works into an arbitrarily arranged marriage, it encourages a much less stressful sort of union, brings about a much more authentic reciprocity and a much deeper intimacy. Perhaps even more importantly, this approach places the inexperienced writer in a situation where much needed support and encouragement are given almost automatically. One of the experienced writers she is working with both indicates a point of entry to the work of the other and guides her through it. Then, as I have said, the situation is reversed; but from the vantage point of the inexperienced writer, it remains unaltered: she still has as her ally a writer of great experience.

Talking about the people who inhabit a work of literature is probably the most comfortable way of approaching it. When the

inexperienced writer confronted experienced writers individually the initial focus was upon identification with characters. Now we have another sort of association, this between one character and another. Once again class discussion provides the opportunity for rehearsal. How would the protagonist of this work behave if she were in the same predicament as the protagonist of that work? How would Meursault (The Stranger) respond to Mrs. Sinico's offer ("A Painful Case")? How would Raymond (The Stranger) behave if he were a guest at the party in "The Dead"? If Salamano (The Stranger) met Farrington ("Counterparts"), what would they talk about? What would happen if Marie (The Stranger) lived down the hall from Bob Doran ("A Boarding House")? I have been referring to Camus's The Stranger and Joyce's Dubliners because I find them particularly efficacious in the first phase of this more complex relationship "between writers." Although the former is a translation from the French of a novel set in pre-war Algeria, the latter the work of one of the most difficult writers in the language, they have proven particularly accessible. And then there are those titles. Transposing characters is, as I have said, a comfortable, almost natural beginning; titles are another sort of beginning. When I move my students from discussing characters in "what if" situations to writing about them in such situations, I do so by way of titles. The one drawback to this approach is that it works only with titles that are suggestive. For a title to be transferrable to

another literary work it must signify a concept with a number of possible relevancies, as does The Stranger, for example, and "The Dead." Since such titles refer to aspects of the human condition, students thus approach literature's most abstract element, theme, by way of its most immediately interesting element, character. Here is the writing assignment I have been promising, the one that pairs The Stranger and Dubliners, that requires students to move between Camus and Joyce:

> What's in a title? . . . Both Camus and Joyce, I think, felt that there was a great deal. I also think that, as writers anyway, they had much else in common, and I want you to use their titles as a way of connecting The Stranger and Dubliners. Do that like this: Choose three stories from Dubliners whose titles you feel describe characters in The Stranger. For each title, a different character; and be sure to consider all the different meanings of the title, all the different ways it can be applied to the character. (Consult your dictionary while you are choosing titles and characters.)
>
> Believe it or not, that's only the first half of the assignment. Now I want you to do the reverse of what you have just done. That is, show me how Camus's title can be applied to three characters from Dubliners--one from each of the stories whose titles you used in the first part of the assignment. Talk about symmetry! (Keep in mind that The Stranger is sometimes, and some say more accurately, translated as The Outsider.)

Students might complain that there are not enough suggestive titles in Dubliners. If they do, they can be asked during class discussion to do some quick revising in this regard. They can, for example, replace a title that is also the name of the major character, "Eveline" say, with a word or phrase that sums up that character's predicament, "paralysis," say, or "a woman in conflict." And they can also be given a list of literary works they have not yet read or will not read in this course. (A fringe benefit: students are both given a valuable reading list and made curious about the books on it.) Again the emphasis is upon suggestiveness, upon titles that offer concepts. Crime and Punishment, No Exit, The Fall, The Turn of the Screw, "The Beast in the Jungle"--these titles come most readily to mind, perhaps because I have taught all these works under the sorts of circumstances I have been describing. Once enough retitling has been accomplished to satisfy everyone, the class can then go on to do the transposition assignment I have described. "Their" titles are as valid here as James Joyce's.

What I usually do next is to ask my students to be as superficial as they can be, to tell me what a particular work is most obviously "about." Then I ask them to consider a second work. And if there is sufficient time, I have them approach these works in two stages. First, they write auto-biographically in a manner similar to that which I described when talking about the one-to-one relationship between an experienced

writer and an inexperienced one. Then comes the transposition, the "crossing over": the obvious theme of the first work becomes a not so obvious theme of the second, whose obvious theme is likewise rendered not so obvious. And so the relationship "between writers" grows even more complex. But there is always a way of simplifying matters--this is, after all, only an introduction to literature. For example, the following assignments require a consideration of Paradise Lost, but I give my students only excerpts from Milton's poem: such key scenes as the temptation, the fall, the expulsion. And to help them comprehend these I also give them the same scenes from John Collier's Milton's Paradise Lost: Screenplay for Cinema of the Mind. But the assignments remain challenging nonetheless:

1. Describe a "paradise" you lived in and a "creature" you made. (Give me as much detail as you can.) Compare and contrast your "paradise" with that of Milton/Collier, your "creature" with that of Frankenstein/Shelley. (Rather than giving me everything on your "paradise" and your "creature," and then moving on to Paradise Lost and Frankenstein, try interweaving your descriptions. Remind me to talk about interweaving techniques.) Then tell me how you lost your "paradise" and how you turned your "creature" into a "monster." Compare and contrast your "loss" with that described by Milton/Collier, your making your creation "monstrous" with the degeneration of

Frankenstein's creature. Again, interweave; and, as you compare and contrast (right from the description of your "paradise"), analyze. Trying to answer these questions as honestly and fully as you can might help you in your analysis: Why is Milton's paradise the way it is? Shelley's creature the way he is? Why does Frankenstein make a man? Why do you consider your "paradise" a paradise? Why did you create your "creature"? Why is Milton's paradise "lost"? Why does Frankenstein's creature become a monster? Why did you lose your "paradise"? Why did you make your creation a "monster"? Milton wrote another book called Paradise Regained; any chance of your regaining your "paradise"? Frankenstein does nothing to help his monster; anything you did, or could do, to help your "monster" become less "monstrous"? The important thing in this assignment is to show me as many parallels as you can while being sensitive to significant contrasts and qualifications. A suggestion for an interesting variation: tell me how someone, or something, made you first a "creature," then a "monster."

2. It could be said that Frankenstein is a monster story. Paradise Lost is a story about, among other things, the paradise of Genesis and how "we" lost it. What I want you to do in this assignment is to reverse things: Talk about monsters in Paradise Lost and tell me how they come to be monsters; talk about paradises in Frankenstein and tell me how they are lost. Notice the plurals: monsters and

paradises. Obviously, that means that I want you to find more than one monster in Paradise Lost, more than one paradise in Frankenstein. (I think that there is one obvious monster in Paradise Lost and one obvious paradise in Frankenstein--but I also think that there are less obvious ones, no less vital for being less obvious.) Begin your paper with definitions and demonstrations: of monsters generally and paradises generally (generally for you, that is--here you'll have to show what in your thinking, feeling, experiencing and valuing makes you see monsters and paradises the way you do). You may find yourself altering (expanding, qualifying, even contradicting) your definitions of monster and paradise as you move deeper and deeper into the works--fine. If you run into problems, just recall the monsters and paradises in your own life.

3. At the end of Paradise Lost--and I mean both Milton's poem and Collier's adaptation of it--we watch as Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, dispossessed, kindly asked to vacate the premises . . . And they have no choice but to cope. What I want you to do here is to find in Frankenstein a parallel to this sequence of events--the good life in "paradise"/"loss" of same/reaction. Though Mary Shelley refers to Paradise Lost quite often, you shouldn't rely on her to point out a parallel for you; trust your own judgment, and imagination.

Set up your essay like this: Describe the "paradise" in Frankenstein so that I'm convinced that indeed it is such for the character or characters involved. Then, discuss the way in which it is "lost"--whose fault is that? is there a Satan involved? has this turn of events been preordained? Finally, analyze the results of this catastrophe--how the character or characters involved cope, or fail to. No: this isn't a comparison/contrast paper; but you will have to play up the similarities between the sequence of events in Milton/Collier and that in Shelley, and to note important differences as well. I'd be particularly impressed if you indicated whether the "exit" you see in Frankenstein is closer to Milton's conclusion or to Collier's.

The next step is to have students work with themes that are more subtle. Two works used in a previous assignment can be used again, or the next two works on the reading list can be exploited. It all depends of course on how much a particular group of students is able to read. I have come to rely more and more on excerpts. For the Inferno/Hamlet pairing, I give my students a chart of Dante's hell and his thirty-fourth canto, which describes the deepest level. That's all they need. My hope is that they will have become curious enough to read more later, on their own. I am surprised by how many students do just that, though it might take them years before they have the time and the energy to make the complete trip:

1. Damn! One of the major characters in Hamlet, that is: the prince himself, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia or Laertes. And damn the character you choose not just to any old hell but to Dante's Inferno. First step: Take a good look at the "map" I've given you and find the single group of sinners (The Lustful, False Counselors, and so on) to which your particular sinner most properly belongs. Next, draw up an "indictment": make a case that this character of Shakespeare's is indeed guilty of that sin specified by Dante. Finally, devise a fitting punishment for your sinner. And remember: Dante's Inferno is not a "simple" hell of fire and brimstone but, rather, a much more imaginative creation, a place that allows a great variety of subtle punishments. You've finished with this question when you've proven to me that the specific punishment you've damned your character to is the most appropriate one given the specific sin or sins s/he has committed.
2. Some readers refer to The Stranger as a prison novel. The characters in Dubliners wander about the city a lot; unlike Meursault in the second half of The Stranger, they are free to come and go as they wish. Like the first assignment, this one asks you to undertake a creative reversal. Show me, in as much detail as you can, how Meursault can be seen as being "free" while in prison, and how three Dubliners can be seen as "prisoners" even though they are not locked up. Of course you'll have to start by defining "freedom" and

"prison" and by considering the different ways in which these words can be taken. (Keeping this in mind might help too: "freedom" involves both being "free to" and being "free from"; a "prison" both "locks in" and "locks out.")

At the next degree of difficulty, students can be asked to rewrite a complete work in another genre. (One of the things that an introductory course should do is to expose students to the major literary genres.) I begin by having the class adapt a work to the genre with which they are most familiar--film. We talk about film, and then I give them a small portion of a shooting script. Many shooting scripts are now in print: I prefer to use comedies--A Night at the Opera, for example--because the quick pace allows for a large variety of camera set ups within a few pages. The first assignment I give in this sequence asks students simply to envision a movie:

1. Imagine that you are casting a movie based on Joyce's Dubliners. Choose actual movie, stage or TV actors for six major speaking parts. (Please select characters from six different stories; that's only fair, I think.) Don't limit yourself to Irish actors, but do consider how convincingly Irish and "Dubliners class"--accent, mannerisms, and so on--your actors will be on screen. Tell me what each role demands and what characteristics each of your actors has that make him or her an excellent choice. Briefly describe two other roles each actor has played--roles similar to the one you're casting the actor

in, or roles that have in some way prepared the actor for the part in Dubliners. (Cast "against type" if you wish, but please make a good case for doing so.) Find ways of avoiding the conditional ("I would choose," "I would like," and so on). You might wind up using something like "I see So-and-So as . . ." or "So-and-So seems an excellent choice for. . . ."

2. Imagine that one of The Canterbury Tales has been made into a first-rate movie . . . Good: now tell me what that movie is like by writing a review of it. (You may choose the "General Prologue" instead of a tale, but please don't bother with either "The Cook's Tale"--it's unfinished--or "The Parson's Tale"--it's really just raw material.)

You're the kind of reviewer who does her homework: you've read the tale carefully before going to see the movie. You won't patronize your readers by summarizing the tale, but you will discuss how tale and movie compare. What sorts of imaginative techniques does the director use to capture on film all in the tale that is essential (characterizations, events, themes, spirit)? What does s/he add? subtract?

The way to approach this is to find a tale you like and then to consider seriously the problem of adapting it successfully for the screen. Show me that you've studied the opening of A Night at the Opera and that selective glossary of terms used by movie-makers. Present tense.

Since students find poetry more difficult than narrative or drama, I generally do not introduce it until late in the semester. But since most poems are shorter than most narrative and dramatic works, they can actually be adapted and adapted in their entirety. One can be transformed into a shooting script, for example. But converting a poem into a one-act play is not an unreasonable demand. And there is, of course, the short story:

Choose a poem of at least fourteen lines and adapt it to another genre in accord with one of the following:

1. Write a screenplay based on the poem. Even though you'll be working on a much smaller scale, follow John Collier's technique in Milton's Paradise Lost--typographically and otherwise. Also, look over the opening scene of A Night at the Opera and that glossary I gave you to refamiliarize yourself with film concepts and terms, but, like Collier, always put readability and vividness over cinematographic precision. (Rather than indicate a camera setup--close up, pan, etc.--Collier usually describes, specifically and evokingly, what the "viewer" sees; note all the sentences that begin with "We . . ." He is, though, very clear about the "subject" of each shot; look at the captions--SATAN, PANDEMONIUM, and so on.)

   Please don't give me a mechanical adaptation; be as uninhibited and imaginative as Collier is about adding, subtracting and rearranging.

2. Transform the poem into a one-act, one-scene play. ("One scene" means one setting--a place about the size of a, well, stage--and a single, uninterrupted period of time. Waiting for Godot is a two-act play, and each act has one scene.) Give me at least two characters. Use Godot as a model for setting up dialogue and stage directions. (Which tense must stage directions always be in? . . . Good!)

3. Poem into short story. Here, too, limit yourself to one setting and a single, uninterrupted period of time. (How long? Well, about as long as it would take a careful reader to read the story. And what "careful reader" do I have in mind?) Here, too, at least two characters. Use the Dubliners stories as models for narrative/description and dialogue (if you like, you can also use Joyce's trick for avoiding quotation marks). But compared with anything in Dubliners, yours will be a "short" short story.

Yeah, I don't want a mechanical adaptation here either; but I can't think of anyone besides former students of mine who has transformed a poem into a short story. Joyce is probably the best place to go for inspiration.

*If you don't choose a poem from our anthology or from among the poems I've xeroxed, please give me a copy of the "original" along with your adaptation.

**The point of this assignment is to exercise your verbal imagination by drawing upon a different vocabulary

and syntax to express a similar meaning in a different context. Of course, the meaning will change somewhat, but the ideas and events should be covered in the same order of the original.

***Whichever genre you choose, give me a "protocol" along with your adaptation. (Want me to be specific about length? O.K.--at least <u>five</u> paragraphs, and remember how much I like long paragraphs: yeah, at least 10-12 lines each.) In your protocol you should tell me exactly what you did and why; you should describe both your decisions and your reasons for them. Be as thorough as you can; and the best way of ensuring thoroughness might be to go through the poem line by line, showing me how each line has been adapted. Write in the <u>present tense</u>, and quote freely from both the poem and your adaptation. (Yeah, I'm after specificity here, too.) Conclude your protocol by telling me how successful you've been in expressing "a similar meaning in a different context." (Here's your chance to convince me that you've done all I asked, that I have absolutely no grounds for complaint!)

Near the end of the semester, students can be given assignments that ask them to deal with two works in a more comprehensive fashion. That is, they now have to cover just about everything of importance. Since they have been writing comparison/contrast essays in other courses, and since many of them probably still find security in that format, they must be

"seduced" away from it into a more adventurous approach. They must be asked to "play-act" as well as write, to become one of the two writers under consideration and to have that writer talk to or about the other. Just as previously they have been asked to transpose one writer's theme into the work of another, so now they must impose everything they know about one writer upon another.

1. Make believe that either Joyce of Kafka is a self-absorbed magazine editor. Then make believe that the other one is an aspiring writer who has sent in a short story to the self-absorbed editor's magazine. Where are you going to get a short story on such short notice? Simple: Dubliners or The Penal Colony stories, depending upon whom you have cast as whom in this scenario. Your editor is self-absorbed because he writes short stories himself, has had a book of them published (yeah, either Dubliners or The Penal Colony stories, depending . . .), and has been hailed a genius. So he will publish the story he has received only upon the condition that the aspiring writer make major changes; he is very specific about these changes, and all of them are based upon his own conception of what a short story should be and do. In other words, the self-absorbed editor wants to make the aspiring writer's short story as much like his own writing as he can. In fact, he is so self-absorbed that he doesn't stop at explaining to the aspiring writer what he wants done; he shows him by pointing to specific things in

his own stories (yeah, Dubliners or The Penal Colony stories, depending . . .). Remember, he has suggestions for everything: plot, characterization, style, theme, imagery, and anything else he can think of. (If the self-absorbed editor is Joyce, he will probably insist upon an "epiphany.") Sometimes he shows the writer what he wants by rewriting things himself (in this he is like a hard-to-please English teacher). The self-absorbed editor makes his demands in a letter to the aspiring writer. What I want is that letter.

2. Choose one of these fantasies: James Joyce is writing a review of Waiting for Godot; Samuel Beckett is writing a review of one of Joyce's works (Dubliners, A Portrait, Ulysses or Finnegans Wake--it's up to you). In either case, the writer doing the reviewing is an egomaniac: he likes whatever reminds him of his own work, hates whatever doesn't. And, worse yet, he continually draws upon his own work for examples of the "right way" to do things: in fact, he winds up talking more about his own writing than the work he is supposed to be reviewing. He is a thorough reviewer, though, in that he covers the essential elements of a literary work: plot (what is happening); characters (who is making things happen; to whom things are happening); theme (why events are taking this particular course; why the characters are behaving in this particular way); and even genre (how the material is being presented). In addition, your reviewer is methodical: he devotes a

paragraph to each of these elements, and his paragraphs are all about the same length.

So pick a reviewer and write the review for him. Remember: the more you have him show off, the more you'll be showing me that you know his work very well. Present tense.

However, the relationship between experienced writers does not necessarily have to be an antagonistic one. In fact, an inexperienced writer has the power to arrange a kind of collaboration:

This one has a high "difficulty rating." Here's the fantasy: You meet someone who has never read a novel, someone who in fact has no idea what a novel is (an "under-achieving" Martian perhaps). S/He has a burning desire to read a novel and asks you for one, but all you have in your possession are The Trial and Mrs. Dalloway (perhaps you've been accosted by this curious Martian on your way to class). You want to turn this person (creature? being?) on to novels, but you feel that neither The Trial nor Mrs. Dalloway comes close enough to being a "great" choice, that each lacks something (or many things). Together, though, they reveal what a novel should ideally be; they complement each other, you feel. So show me how. To start you might want to define "novel" (do a little research); then you might want to discuss different aspects of the novel--character, plot, setting, theme, "voice," etc. But I want you to remain "subjective," both in your definition of "novel" and in your selection and

discussion of "aspects." What you think is important is important (and the Martian will never know the difference; after reading your paper, he will climb back into his flying saucer). I am asking you to accept this premise: The Trial and Mrs. Dalloway together would give anyone a clear idea of how a novel should be written. But how and why this is so, that has to come from your response to The Trial and Mrs. Dalloway, as well as from your lack of response because there was nothing where there should have been something. (It might be a good idea to make a list of pluses and minuses for both The Trial and Mrs. Dalloway based on a working definition of"novel.")

None of the approaches I have been discussing and demonstrating need be limited to two literary works. There is no reason why these transactions, transpositions and transferences cannot be extended to three or more. In fact, the research paper I usually assign in an introduction to literature asks students to bring together three groups of writers. The first group consists of four of the writers read during the semester. Each student must take a theme from one of those writers, discuss it, and show how the writer develops it, dramatizes it, and so on. But that's only the paper's introduction. Next the student must show how this theme emerges in the work of the three other writers, even if, as is often the case, the theme will be hard to detect in contexts different from the original one and different from one another. Perhaps

the (re)emergence of the theme will be as much a matter of the inexperienced writer's ingenuity as of the experienced writer's intention. By this point students will have become quite adept at the fine art of "reading in."

Then comes the research, the student's encounter with a second group of writers. She must make copies of her first draft and give them to four of the writers in the class, each of whom will respond to her analysis. (There will be reciprocity of course: she will have to do the same thing for each of her four classmates. Yet another kind of activity "between writers.") In the final draft of her paper, the writer must incorporate portions of the responses she has received--she must quote, paraphrase--and she must make appropriate use of them: either they will serve as supports or they will raise objections that must be considered.

The writer must also do further research, research of a more traditional sort. She has had to deal with one group of writers already, experienced ones; and a second group as well, inexperienced ones. Now she must turn to a group of more or less experienced writers--literary critics, "English teachers in print." Again the operative number is four, but this time it is four critics for each literary work. (Often, though, particularly with a promising class, I do not allow my students to stop there. I ask them to find additional sources: to have friends or family members read the literary works being considered and to get their responses, either in writing or just verbally,

either without their having read the writer's first draft or right after they have had that privilege.)

This sort of maneuvering and exchanging "between writers" not only humanizes the entire process of research, not only makes the activity of writing a paper something of a social event, but has the effect of making students less dependent on literary criticism. With a variety of responses at their disposal, they are more likely to regard it as a particular source than as the ultimate solution. To dramatize the fact that literary critics are after all only writers too, I have my class read first Molly Bloom's soliloquy from Joyce's Ulysses and then the comments of three famous Joyceans with regard to her (in)famous final "Yes." William York Tindall says that it is indeed a Yes, an affirmation of life, the flesh made key word. Hugh Kenner, on the other hand, insists that it is really a No--Molly is an adultress after all, a recumbent Dubliner as well as a paralyzed one. S. L. Goldberg sees a Maybe--the novel is quite complex; we must consider the ambiguities; and so on. It is crucial to give students the publication dates. Tindall comes first; Kenner comes second and is obviously responding to Tindall; Goldberg brings up the rear, responding to both Tindall and Kenner.

Students come to see that the answers offered by literary criticism are valuable to the extent that they provoke us to find our own answers. If the literary works themselves are not sacred--not, or at least no longer, "verbal icons"--

then how can the words of mere English teachers possibly be? A playful, somewhat deconstructive approach like that I have been advocating helps inexperienced writers learn what experienced writers know: any act of putting words on the page is related to other acts of putting other words on other pages. Writing is always "between writers."